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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
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ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY: 6 OF 6
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality

GIICHI

Former Mugai-*ryū* assassin, saved Hyakurin from a cruel fate–yet led Manji into Kagimura's clutches.

HYAKURIN

Injured, former Mugai-*ryū* assassin, aiding Rin in her search for Manji

BURANDO

Depressed and deranged medical examiner, saved from prison by Kagimura

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's "immortality experiments," as Kagimura seeks to impart the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human. Burando, Kagimura's lead medical examiner, begins to grow more desperate and despondent when he's hit with failure after failure. The deaths of several prisoners under his watch begin to weigh heavily on his mind. Meanwhile, while searching for Manji, Rin and Hyakurin find another old friend . . .

designer SCOTT COOK editorial assistant RYAN JORGENSEN
editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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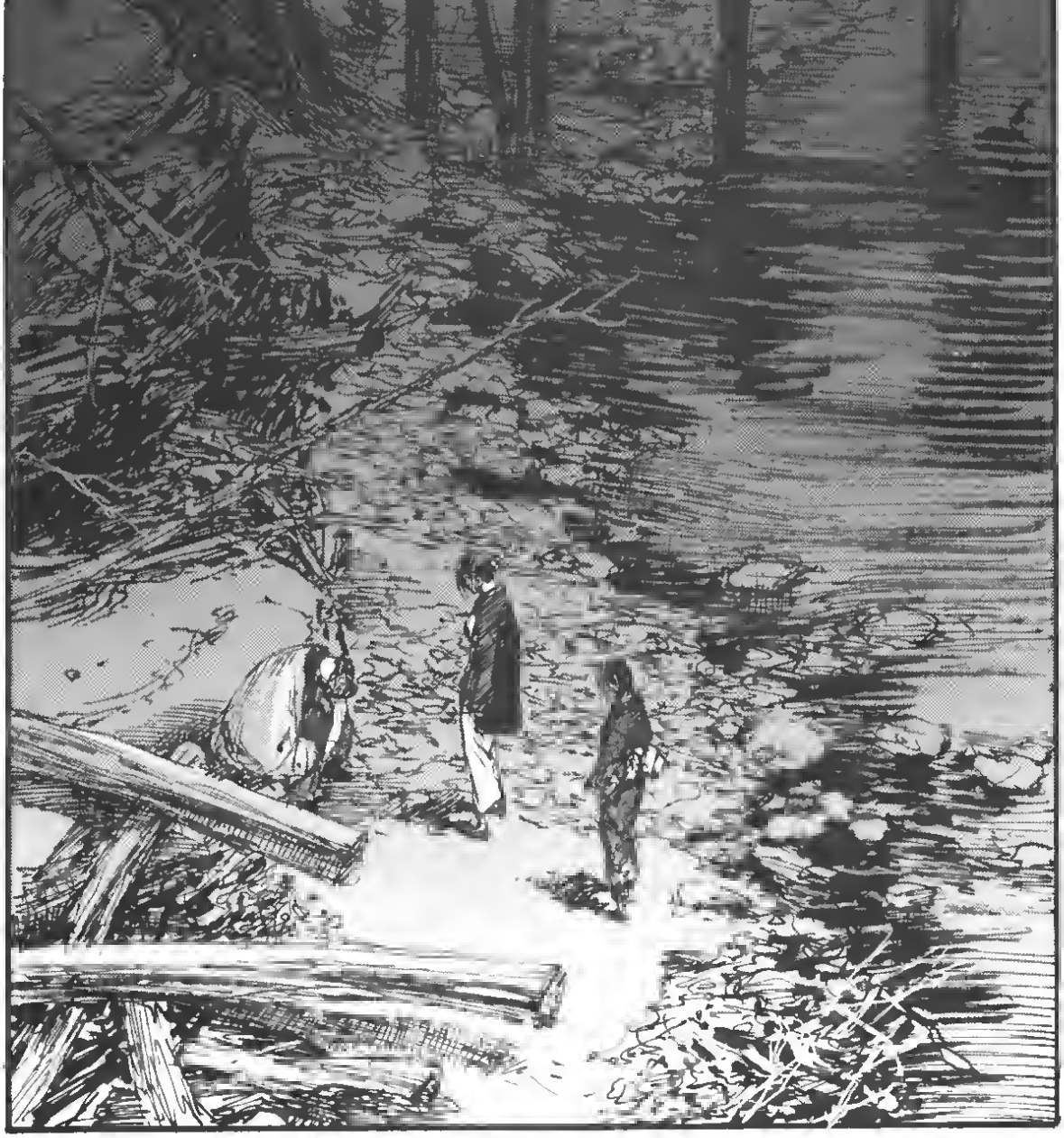
無限の住人

ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY

-part six-

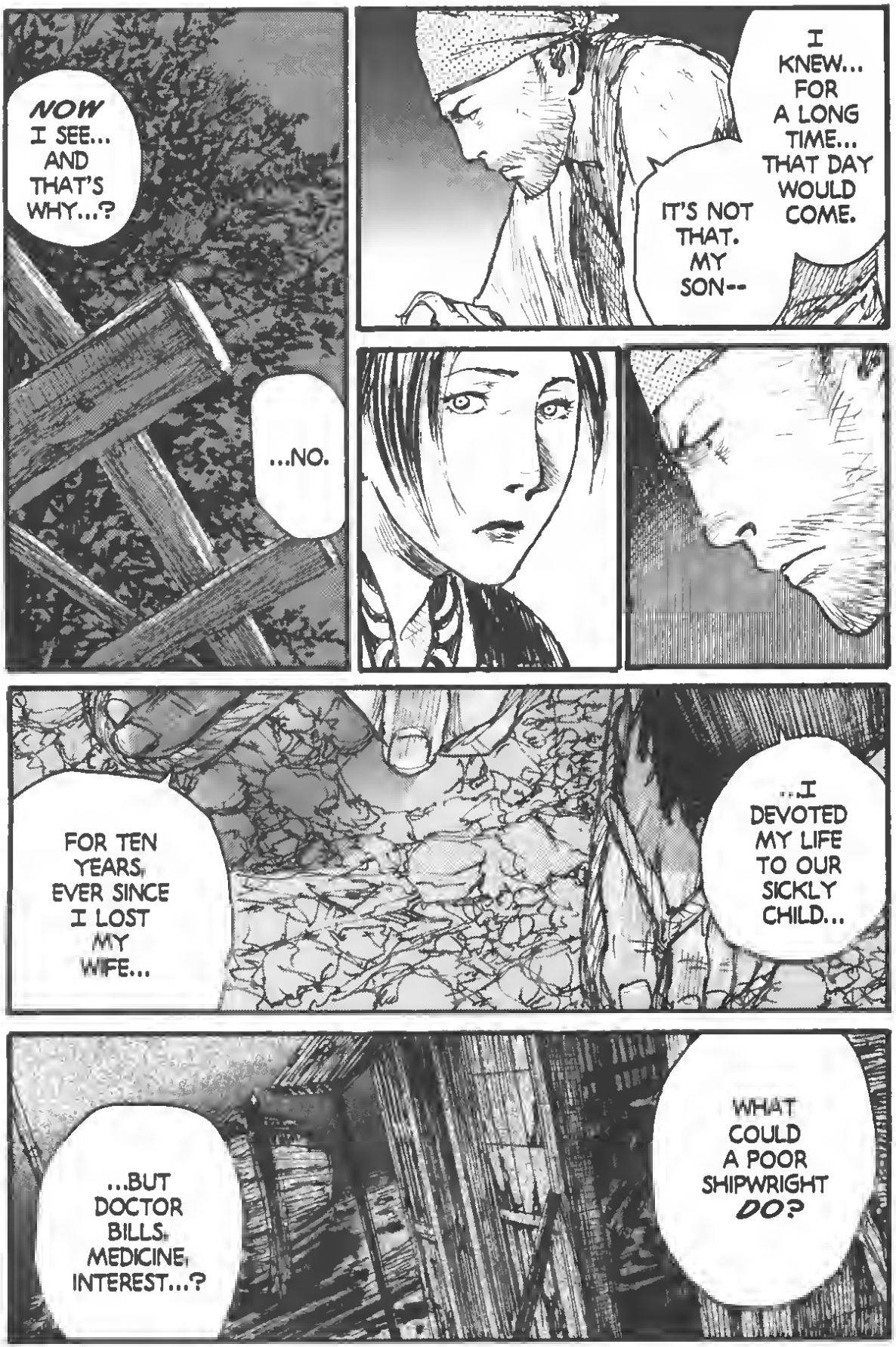


...SO, WHAT'S THE STORY?

YOU TOOK ALL THAT CASH YOU GOT WHEN YOU LEFT THE MUGAI-RYŪ AND BLEW IT ON FOOD AND SAKE?
GAVE IT TO THESE BEGGARS SO THEY'D PUT YOU UP?
HMPH! MUGAI-RYŪ'S GREAT LONER.
NOW LOOK AT HIM. THE BIG COMMUNITY BOOSTER.
I STOP BY HABAKI'S PLACE FOR A CHANGE, AND WHAT?
YOU'VE VANISHED. I'VE BEEN "RETIRED."

YOU KNEW THAT, RIGHT?!
I'VE GOT A MOUNTAIN OF QUESTIONS! BUT FIRST--
AND NOT JUST THAT! THE WHOLE OUTFIT'S GONE.
--MANJI! HE'S BEEN MISSING SINCE HE WENT OFF WITH YOU!
SO WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?! WHAT'D THE BOSS TELL YOU TO DO?
STOP IT...!
MY HEAD... THROB-BING...
RIN, HONEY?
POUR THIS ALL OUT, AND GET ME SOME WATER.
EH? UHM... OKAY.
BASTARD. I'LL WAKE YOU UP.

JUST LOOK AT YOU, GIICHI.
A FINE MAN LIKE YOU.
WHEN DID YOU COME HERE?
WHAT ABOUT LITTLE TŌ--
TŌ- JIRŌ'S... DEAD...
.....
.....
.....


NOW I SEE... AND THAT'S WHY...?
...NO.
I KNEW... FOR A LONG TIME... THAT DAY WOULD COME.
IT'S NOT THAT. MY SON--
FOR TEN YEARS, EVER SINCE I LOST MY WIFE...
...I DEVOTED MY LIFE TO OUR SICKLY CHILD...
...BUT DOCTOR BILLS, MEDICINE, INTEREST...?
WHAT COULD A POOR SHIPWRIGHT DO?

"ON MY SECOND HEIST, ON A FISHERMAN'S STOREHOUSE...
"...I SLIPPED UP.
"I WAS ON DEATH ROW, AWAITING MY TURN...
"...WHEN *HE* SHOWED UP.
"YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO WHAT HE SAID...
AND I TOLD HIM...
"...GET MY SON A *DOCTOR*. IF YOU WON'T, THEN KILL US BOTH.'"

I HUNTED.
RELENT-LESSLY.
JOY-FULLY.
HABAKI KEPT HIS PROMISE.
...A HUNT-ER.
AND I BECAME...
IN THE END, WHEN BOTH MY PREY AND MY SON WERE GONE...
...ALL I HAD LEFT WAS A PILE OF GOLD...
...MY HONEST TO GOD... LIBER-TY.
...AND, AFTER TEN YEARS...
BUT... I CAN'T RECALL...

...WAY BACK THEN... HOW DID I EVER LIVE?
TRY AND TRY, I CAN'T... REMEMBER.

LIVING.
WHAT'S IT MEAN... TO LIVE?

LISTEN, HYAKU...
...THE MUGAI-RYŪ'S GONE...
...AND, NO MATTER WHY, THAT'S STILL...
...A BLESSING FOR YOU.
DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME, HYAKU...
...ON FRIENDS FROM THE BAD OLD DAYS.
HYAKU-RIN... HERE.

ARE WE ALL SOBERED UP?

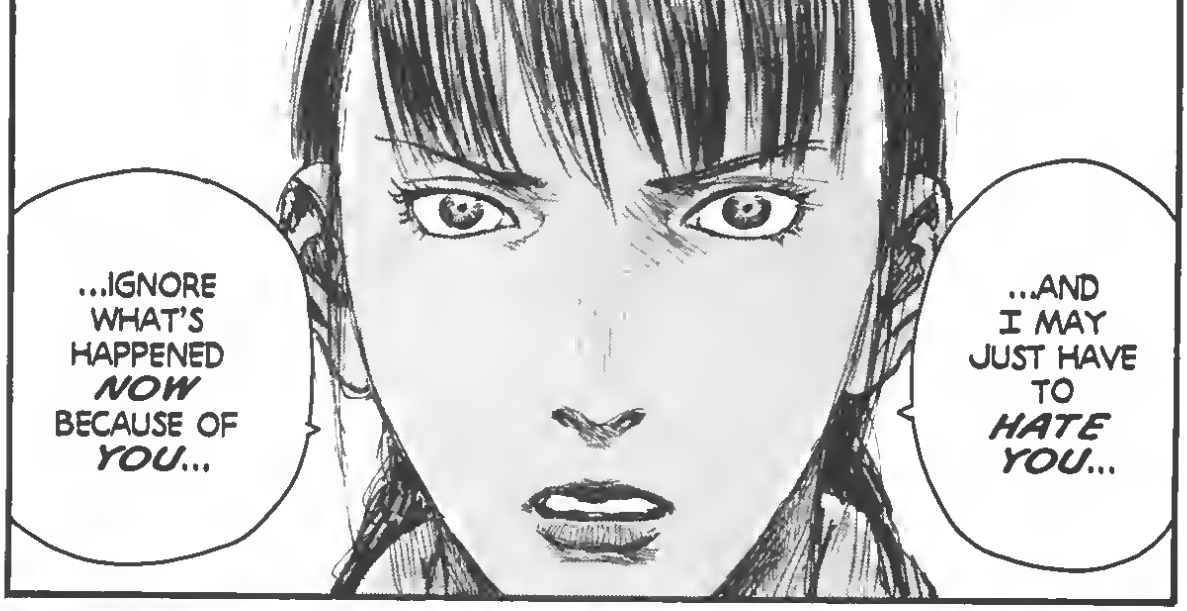
YOUR KID'S DEAD? OH, DEAR!
I LOST TWO OF 'EM, SMARTASS!
I STILL WONDER WHAT I'M DOING WALKING AROUND ALIVE.
SO REMEMBER THIS!!
IT WAS YOU WHO KEPT ME HERE! YOU!
IF YOU AND HABAKI HADN'T SHOWN UP...
...I COULD HAVE JOINED MY HUSBAND AND MY CHILDREN!!

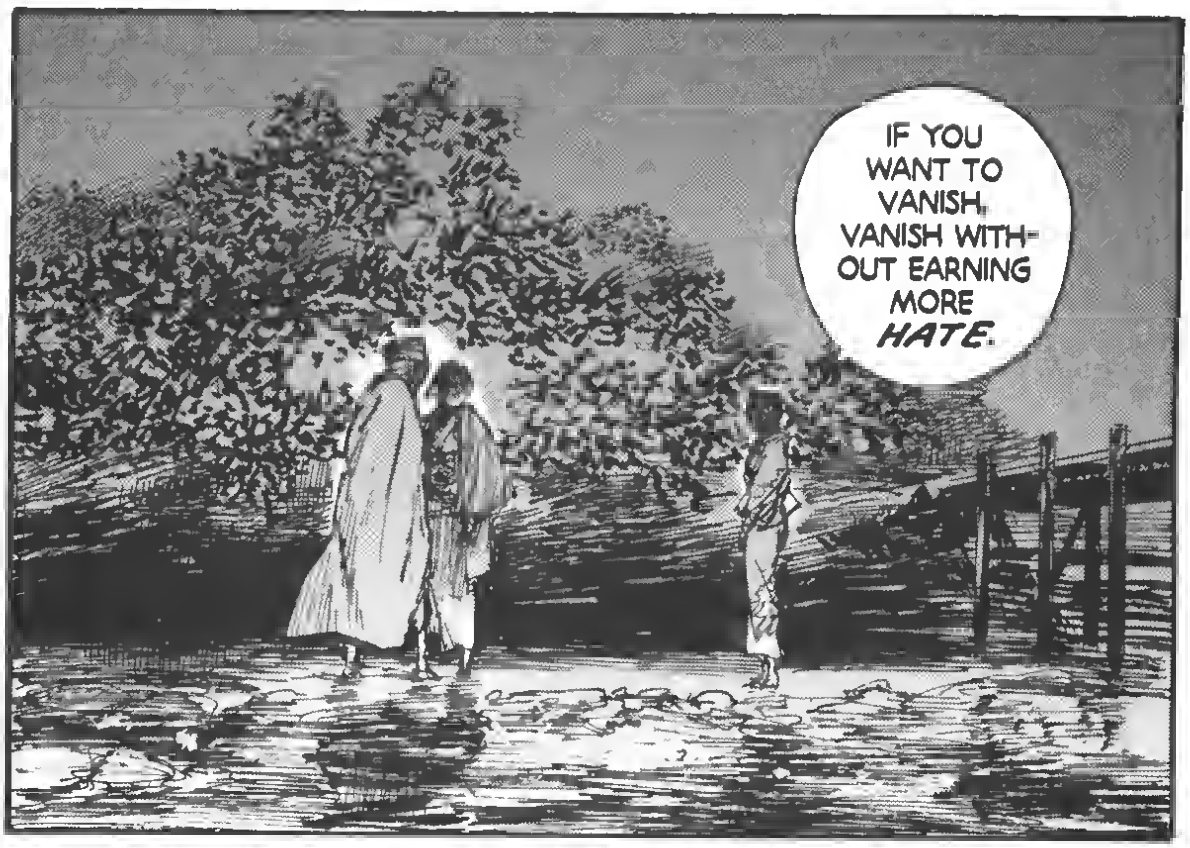
THINK I'LL LET YOU, YOU DAMN BALDIE?!
YOU PLAY GOD WITH SOMEONE WHO NEVER ASKED FOR IT AND THEN TRY TO SLINK OFF ON YOUR OWN?!

GI-ICHI...

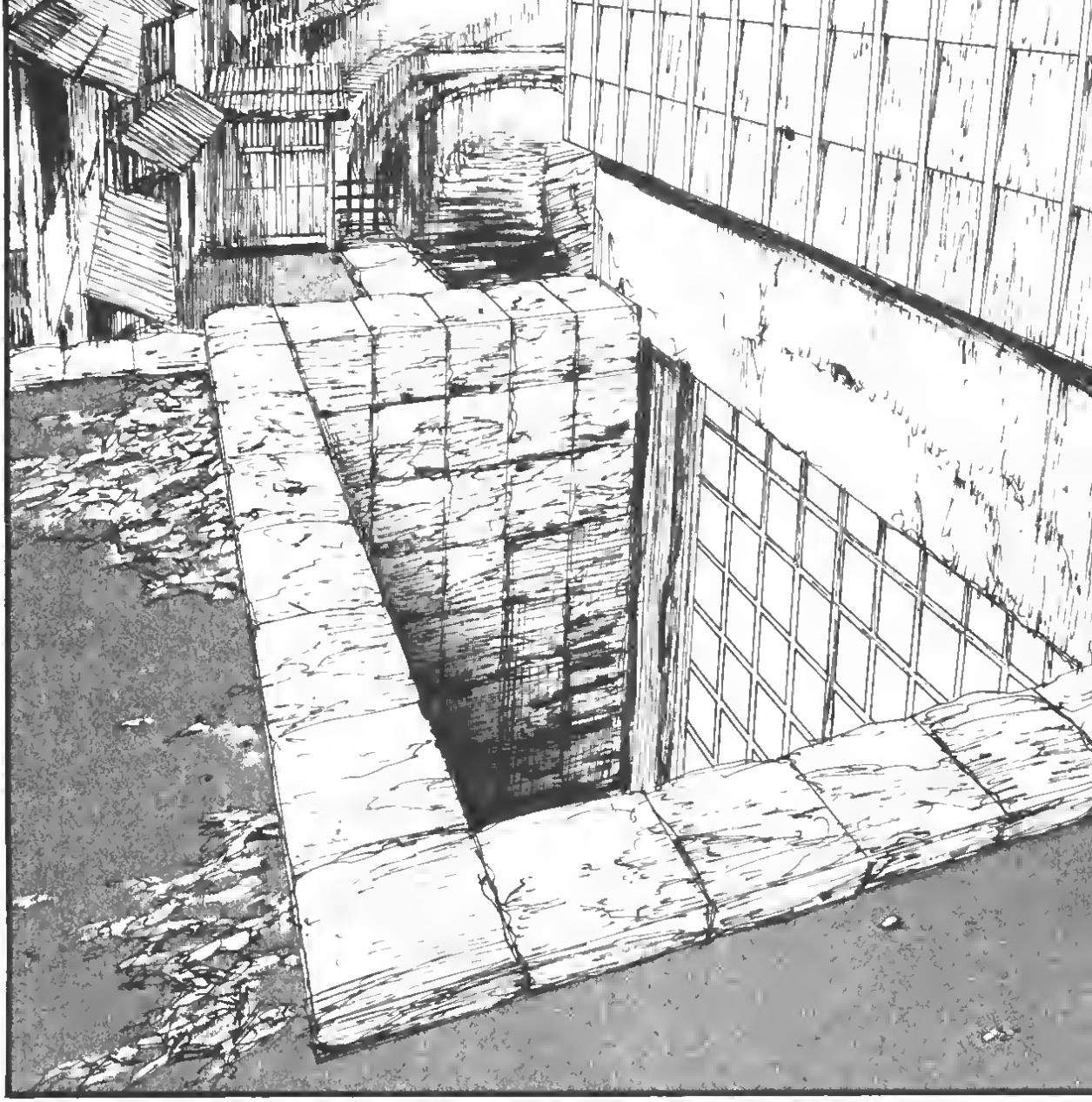
...YOU HELPED ME GET TO KAGA.
I HAVEN'T FORGOT-TEN.

I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN.
BUT...


...IGNORE WHAT'S HAPPENED *NOW* BECAUSE OF *YOU*...
...AND I MAY JUST HAVE TO *HATE YOU*...


IF YOU WANT TO VANISH, VANISH WITHOUT EARNING MORE *HATE*.

...OUCH...

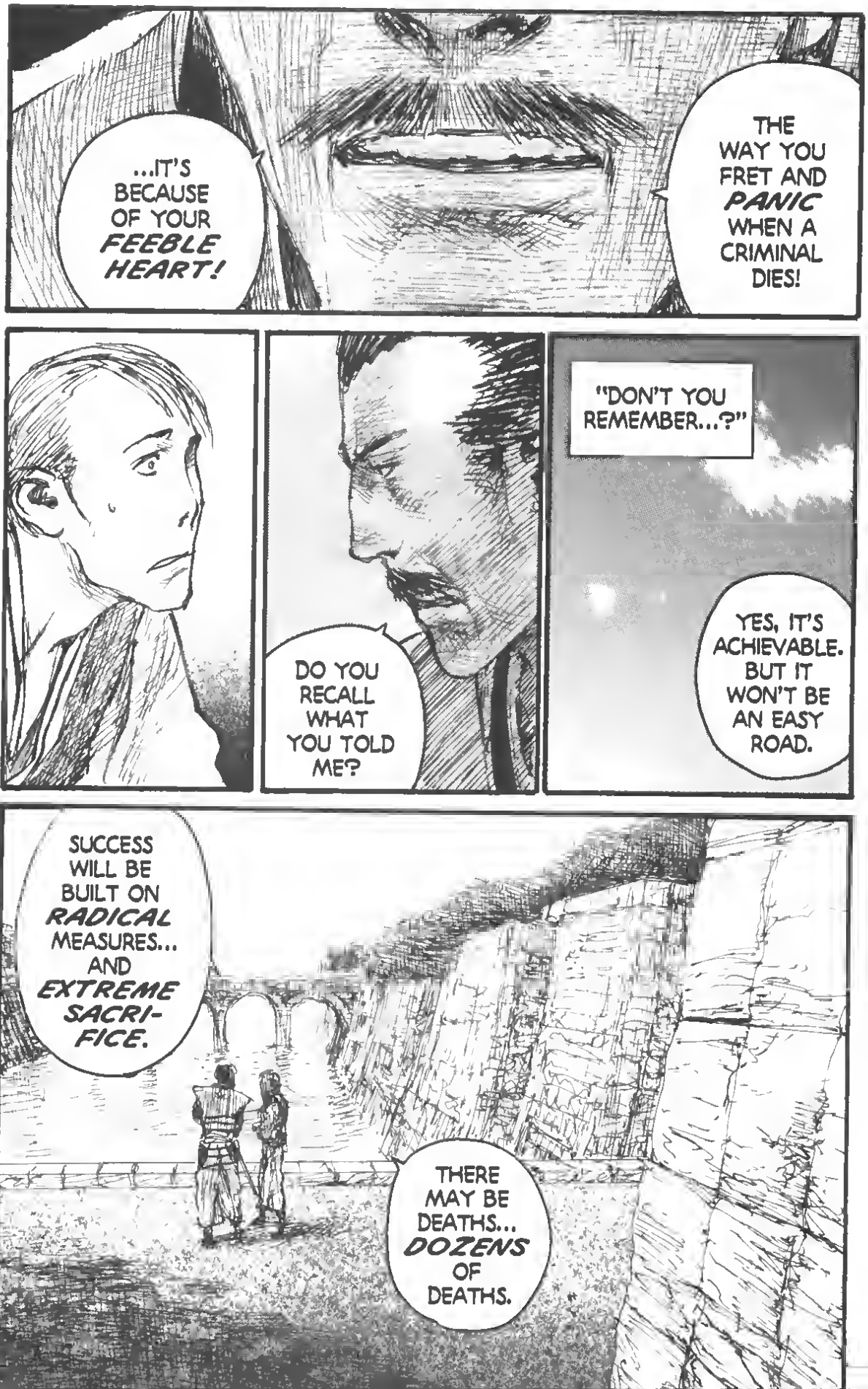


YOU HAVE NO NEW PLANS?

BURAN-
DO...
.....
.....
.....

I LOBBIED THE GO-RŌJŪ TO COLLECT THEM.
ALL THESE MEDICAL TOMES. ANATOMIES. TEXTS FROM JAPAN AND ABROAD.
FOR-BIDDEN DRUGS. ILLEGAL SPECIMENS.

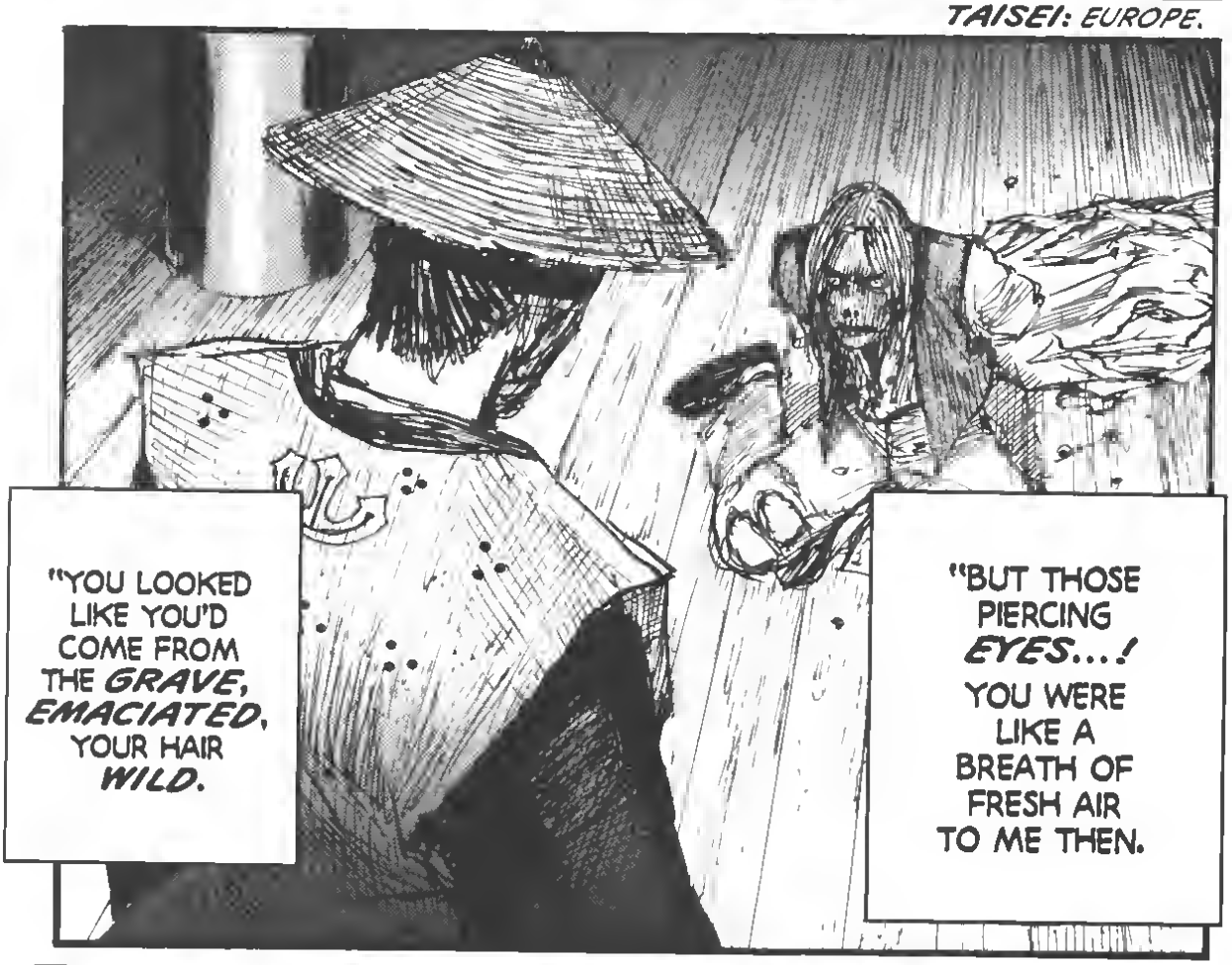
IT SEEMS...
IT WAS JUST TO *SATISFY*...
...YOUR CURIOUS-ITY.
NO... *NO!* I NEVER INTENDED...!
BUT...
BURANDO. IF I LET YOU GO... IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF FAILED *SURGERIES*.

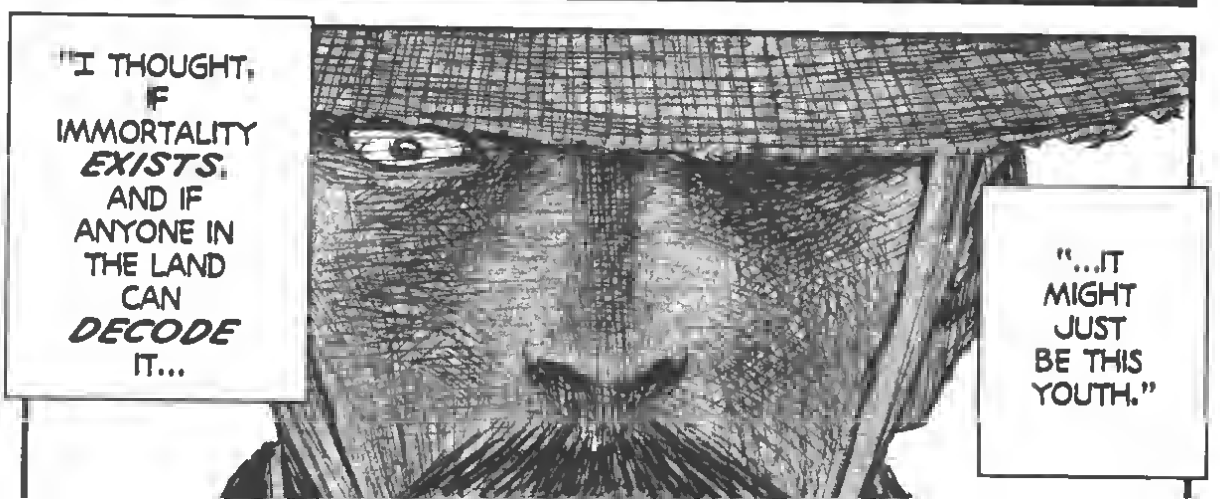

...IT'S BECAUSE OF YOUR FEEBLE HEART!
THE WAY YOU FRET AND PANIC WHEN A CRIMINAL DIES!
DO YOU RECALL WHAT YOU TOLD ME?
"DON'T YOU REMEMBER...?"
YES, IT'S ACHIEVABLE. BUT IT WON'T BE AN EASY ROAD.
SUCCESS WILL BE BUILT ON RADICAL MEASURES... AND EXTREME SACRI-FICE.
THERE MAY BE DEATHS... DOZENS OF DEATHS.

DEWA-NOSUKE ALONE WON'T DO.
I REQUEST TO HAVE ISHIDE TATEWAKI-*DONO* SEND US *ALL* THE DEATHROW INMATES UNDER HIS WATCH.
AND IF THAT'S *STILL* NOT ENOUGH...
...*OTHER* FELONS AS WELL.
"YOUR EYES WERE THE EYES OF A MAN ON A *QUEST*.
"NO ROOM FOR *SENTIMEN-TALITY*. *GLEAMING* WITH THE *CRUEL CONVICTION* OF A TRUE SCIENTIST!"
THINKING BACK, YOUR EYES WERE *ALWAYS* THAT WAY...
...EVEN WHEN THE "KILLER OF A HUNDRED" ROILED THE STREETS...
...AND RUMORS FLEW THAT HE WAS *IM-MORTAL*.

"I ALONE PURSUED THOSE TALES THAT EVERYONE MOCKED. UNTIL, ONE DAY...
"...THEY DRAGGED BEFORE ME A YOUNG DOCTOR, WHO CLAIMED HE'D COME FROM TAISEI.

TAISEI: EUROPE.


"YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU'D COME FROM THE GRAVE, EMACIATED, YOUR HAIR WILD.
"BUT THOSE PIERCING EYES...! YOU WERE LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR TO ME THEN.

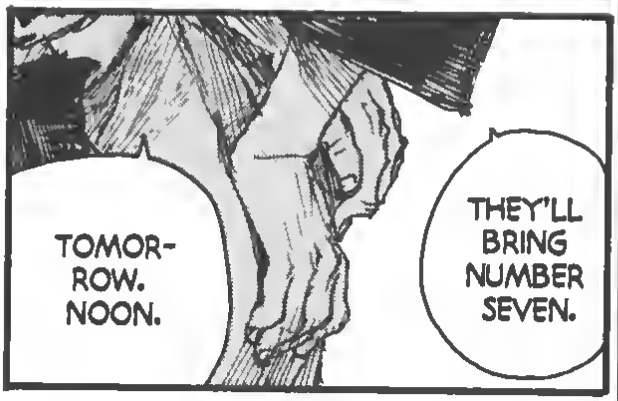


...DEWA-NOSUKE'S BODY AS YOU DID.
...YOU FOLLOWED MŌZEN'S LEAD. YET NO *NORMAL* DOCTOR COULD HAVE REMADE...
TRUE...
...HHF. WELL, I WASN'T MISTAKEN.
...HAVE FAILED *SOONER*.
I'LL TELL YOU WHY.
YOU SHOULD...
...THAT WAS *UNFOR-TUNATE*.
BECAUSE IT ALL WENT BETTER THAN YOU'D DREAMED...
...BECAUSE YOUR FIRST PRISONER LIVED SO *LONG*...
ONLY NOW, I THINK...

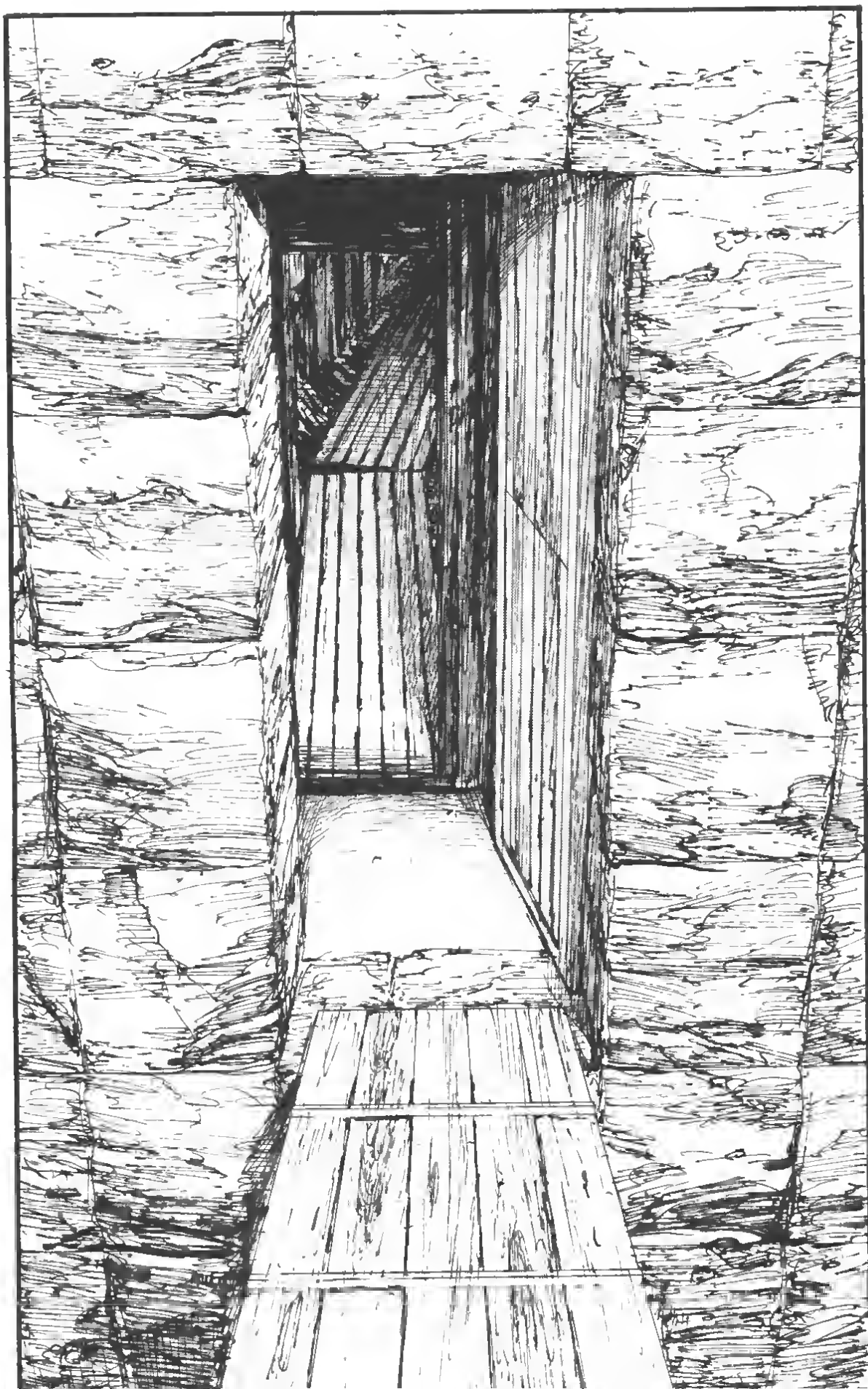
...DEWA-NOSUKE CHANGED.
HE STOPPED BEING A MERE SPECIMEN.
SO NOW... YOUR CONCERN FOR YOUR PATIENTS LEAVES YOU PARA-LYZED.
YOU REPEAT THE SAME PROCEDURE BY ROTE. NOW, YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN A SECOND-RATE COUNTRY DOCTOR!
BUT... BUT, SIR...
TAKE MŌ-ZEN...
WHEN HE VIVISECTED MANJI, HE SAID HE PRE-PARED...
...BY CUTTING OPEN OTTERS.
BURAN-DO.

THAT...
...WAS CORRECT.
YOU THINK YOU'RE CUTTING UP HUMANS.
THINK OF THEM AS BEASTS... AS OTTERS.
THAT'S THE RIGHT ATTITUDE. THEY'RE FROM DEATH ROW.
THEY'RE FATED TO DIE. THE JUDGES KILL THEM, NOT YOU.
INDEED. YOUR WORK GIVES THEM A FLICKERING HOPE OF LIFE...BUT YOU SHOULDN'T LET GUILT TROUBLE YOU.
TO THE CONTRARY, YOU SHOULD BE PROUD!

YOUR CONSCIENCE CAN'T SAVE THEM, BURANDO.
ONLY KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNIQUE CAN!
THOSE... AND A HEART OF STEEL.


TOMOR-ROW. NOON.
THEY'LL BRING NUMBER SEVEN.

ARE YOU UP TO IT... BURANDO?
.....
.....



BURANDO-
DONO?
ENOUGH
COAGULANT?
HAH?
OH...

...!
UNNG...
UOHH HHHHH!
SLASH!
A-ASAEMON-DONO! WAIT! PLEASE WAIIITT!!
?!

BURANDO-DONO...?
OOPSIES!
HEY!! WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU--
DON'T DO IT! HE'LL DIE! DIEEE!
BURAN-DO...
I'M SORRY. I'M... SO SORRY.
SO... SO AFRAID...
P-PEOPLE...
...PEOPLE AREN'T OTTERS...
.....
.....?!
YAIEEEE !!

OWW! GET OFF ME!
BURANDO-DONO!
"THUS IT ENDS...?"
THE OTTER'S WEE LIFE, WEIGHS UPON WAVERING SOUL, THE WOULD-BE DOCTOR.
HMM! IT WORKS!
HABAKI-DONO--
CAN "OTTER" BE THE KIGO?
BURANDO AYAME! I FIND YOU GUILTY OF BANNED RESEARCH!
IMPRISON-MENT-- FOR LIFE!
AWAIT YOUR FATE IN YOUR CELL!
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
THE SPARROW NET, Part 1 of 4

The start of a new story arc, as "The Sparrow Net" begins! Hyakurin, disturbed by her recent encounter with Gichi, takes a break to drink and talk with an intriguing stranger. Dōa and Isaku have two reunions. One will reinforce deep-seated beliefs and long-term goals. The other will have them fighting for their lives in the streets of Edo! Hiroaki Samura's hilarious "Biography" text piece continues, with another exclusive pinup. Stan Shaw gives us another exciting, color *Blade of the Immortal* illustration, with the pinups from issues 117 to 120 linking up to form an exciting *quadtych* image!

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshu*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Go-Rojū: Senior councilors to the shogun, picked from the most trusted feudal lords.

Itto-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kaga: A remote feudal domain on the Japan Sea coast southwest of Edo.

Kaizō Shigi: Ayame Burando's journal. He is writing *On the Perfection of Anatomy*, a record of his medical experiments.

Kigo: Haiku traditionally requires a kigo, a "seasonal word" that evokes one of the four seasons. When Yamada Asaemon completes his haiku in Manji's cell, he wonders, "Is 'otter' the kigo?"

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mugai-ryū: A group of criminals who worked as assassins for the shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets. Disbanded by Habaki Kagimura.

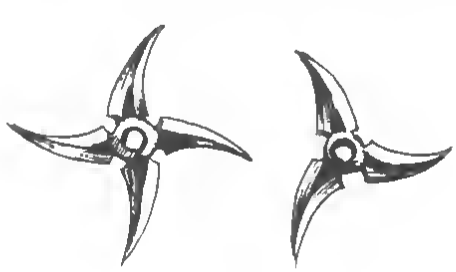
Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school.

Taisei: Europe.

Toshū: Leader, master.

Yamada Asaemon: Nicknamed Kubikiri Asa, the shogun's executioner was a master swordsman, sword tester, and an expert at beheading and cutting human bodies.



ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

BIOGRAPHY

of Hiroaki Samura, Part Three

(Translated by Riko Frohnmayer)

In 1981, the members of the unit Mr. Bation (predecessor to the legendary Hiroaki Samura) started searching for a larger studio space. During the search, they decided to move into Nico Belladonna's parents' place. When Nico was talking to his grandmother one day, she asked him, "Nico, you guys are going to draw my favorite manga, right?" Nico asked her which one that was. "I love *Ijiwaru-Basan* (*Mean Grandma*). That's so fabulous!" she said. With her comments somehow guiding them, they changed their group's name to "YZZY wal Grandma."

They were ready to make a serious commitment to their debut as a professional manga team, and they sequestered themselves into a new studio—cutting themselves off from the outside world and seriously (I mean, SERIOUSLY) concentrating on work.

The result was fabulous. Within only forty-eight hours, they completed their audition piece for their debut as a pro team. Again, seeing this as an opportunity, they changed their unit name to "Mother Fuckerrr (Your Mom Has Debeso)." Incidentally, this name came from Ian A. Ian. He was inspired by an Italian horror movie.

They brought their audition piece to Marvel, the world's biggest comic book publishing firm at the time. Luckily, they happened to receive a nomination for the Best New Artist Award. However, there was one big issue that they needed to deal with. The name "Mother Fuckerrr" was too absurd to use, and Marvel required them to change their name. If they'd accepted this requirement, they not only would have received the award that they were nominated for, their first piece would have also been published with a handsome reward. However, all members agreed that they would not change the group's name. They went through more than ten meetings with the company, but the relationship just got worse. Eventually, their award was thrown away and their dreams of debuting as pro manga artists disappeared as well. "Our group spirit *lives* in our name. There's no way we'd change the name so fuckin' easily. Fuck those people!"

They were back at square one, and their collective motivation immediately fell to near-zero. Needless to say, their private lives became quite reckless during this time. Lee was partying daily with groupies in a Los Angeles hotel, doing any drug that was on the table and performing black magic on his audience. The worst case, however, was Michael Hanneman, who suffered from a seizure while in his apartment in London. In the throes of the seizure, he chopped off his beloved, blond hair with his screen-tone knife and recklessly slashed up most of his furniture. He even broke his favorite Flying V ruler.

This experience gave them an opportunity to write their masterpiece, "The Meat Toilet (aka. VKO)" (published by Andromeda), which openly applauded drug use. The outcome of this very painful chapter in their lives produced a masterpiece. However, they were too young and too ego-driven at the time to appreciate it.

(Continues next issue . . .)

One of Hiroaki Samura's founding members, Nico Belladonna (former steel-mill worker)

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to.

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BACK-COVER PINUP BY STAN SHAW!

Part one of a four part back cover series that will link up to form one large image! Stan's work includes appearances in *Dark Horse Presents*, *Cheval Noir* and *Grendel: Black, White and Red*. He is also a teacher and professional illustrator having worked with *Vibe*, *The Village Voice*, Hasbro, Wizards of the Coast, and Lucas Licensing. Thanks, Stan! We'll see you next month!"

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KRYPTONIA-DGP